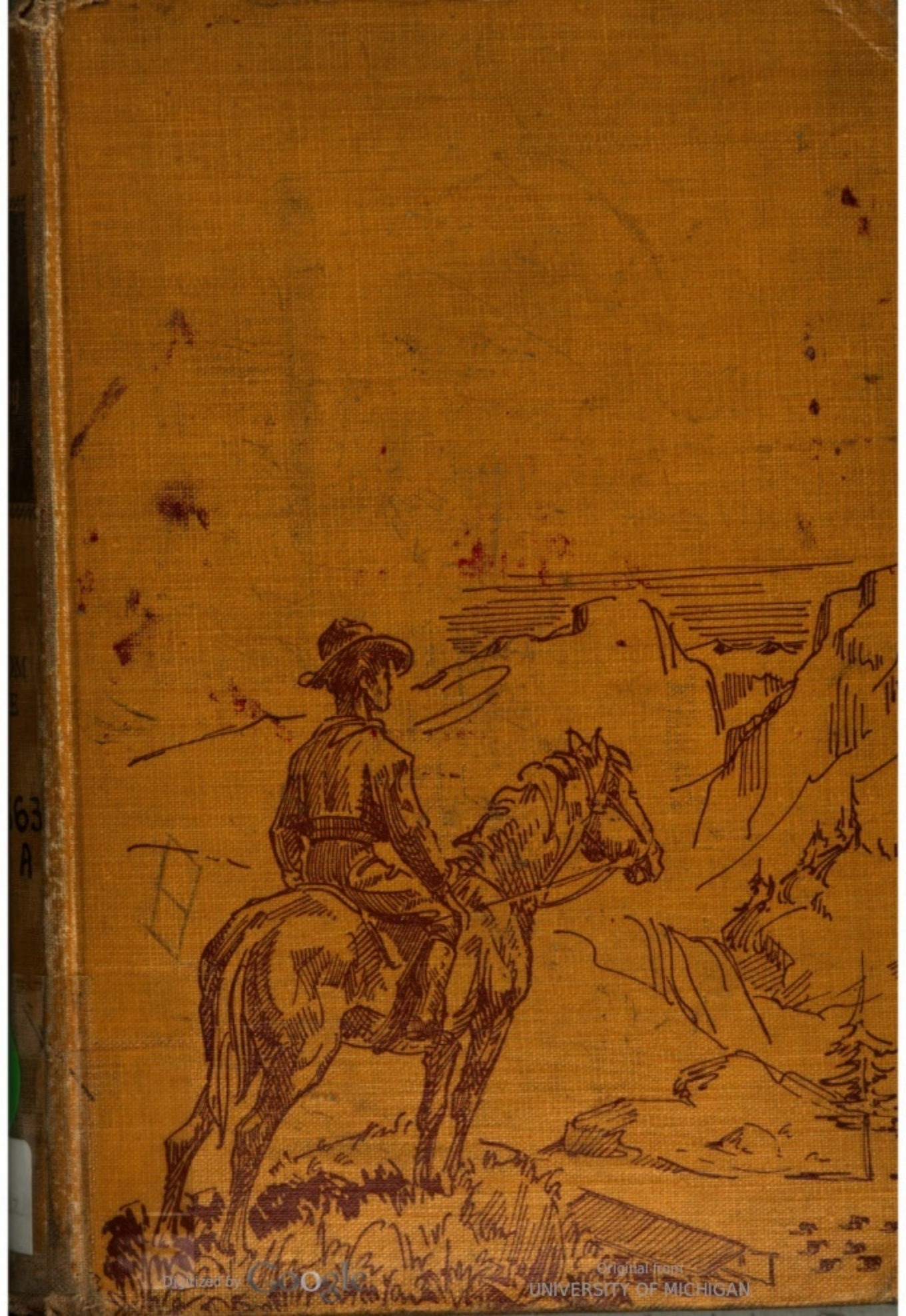

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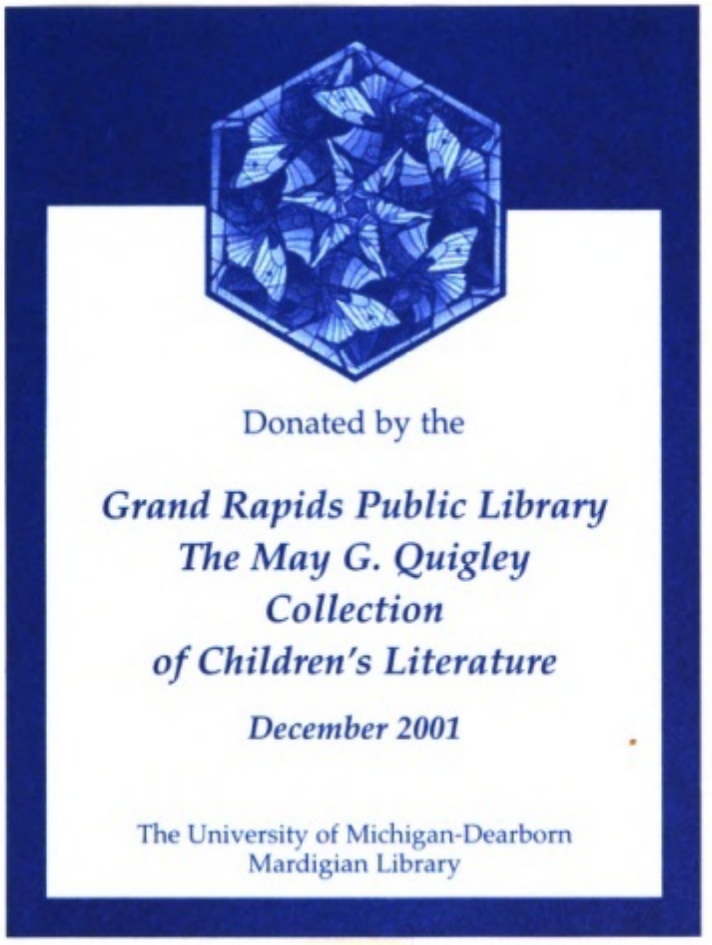

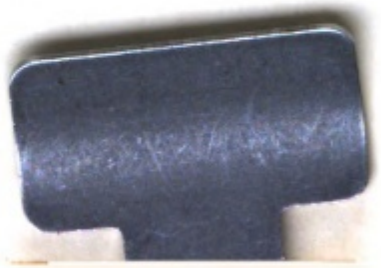

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With the cooperation of his younger brother Neal and his devoted sister Valley, David Chisholm sets to work to restore their old home, Winding Ranch, to fruitfulness and prosperity. He takes over management of a herd of Karakul sheep. He becomes Colorado's corn producing champion. By putting a number of hitherto worthless burros to good use he also plays an important part in the salvation of a mining town which has been isolated by big snows. Hard work, all of it, and David glories in it.

Yet over all David accomplishes there seems to fall a shadow which turns each real achievement into a bitter memory. For unknown reasons jealous neighbors have started a malicious campaign of gossip against him that threatens his ruination. The heaviest blow falls when he is accused of being a water rustler.

After this, David has little hope of realizing his cherished ambition to win honor in the Future Farmers of America, the organization which has been his inspiration for many years. Then, with almost dramatic suddenness, the cruel shadow over Winding Ranch and its young owner begins to lift. The reasons for this change, the part that David plays in the annual convention of Future Farmers at Kansas City, and the surprise that awaits him on his return to Colorado, provide some of the most exciting and colorful chapters in this inspiring story.

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SHADOW OVER WINDING RANCH

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SARAH LINDSAY SCHMIDT

SHADOW OVER WINDING RANCH

Illustrations by RAFAELLO BUSONI

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TO

RAYMOND CONDON

who, while a high school boy in the vocational agriculture course at Platteville, Colorado, developed a variety of seed corn adapted to Colorado conditions. It made him a state corn producing champion. After a five-year test, it was adopted by the Colorado Agricultural Experiment Station as the now widely known and used Colorado 13.

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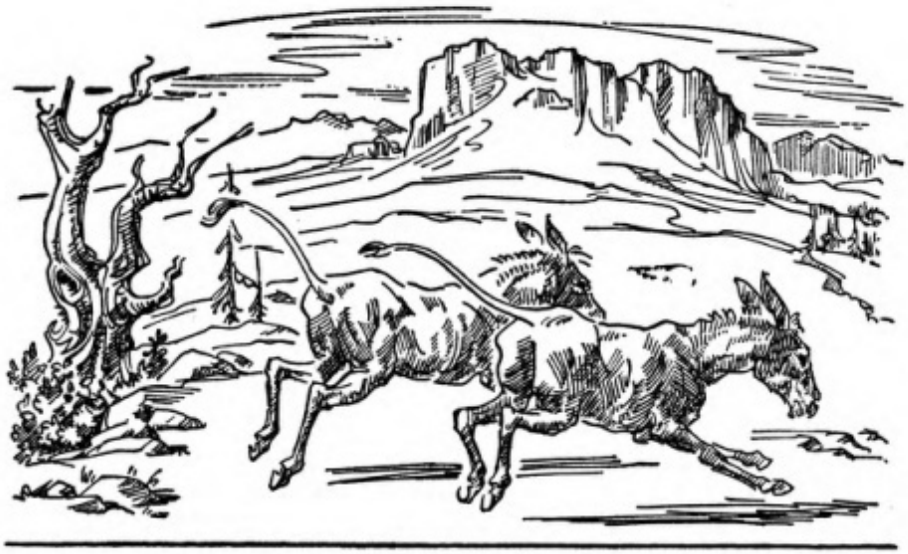

Chapter 1

A STRANGE FENCE

THE Chisholms' old car, little better than a jalopy, had been chugging its way down from the upper end of a mountain valley, beyond which the Chisholm ranch lay. Around curves and over continually rising and falling grade of foothill roadway, it swung at last into the outskirts of the little town of Wagon Rest.

Two boys and a girl, all Chisholms, sat crowded close together on the car's single seat. David, the oldest of the three, was at the wheel, occupying the position of greatest responsibility as a matter of course. The laughter and chatter that vied with the noise of the car came chiefly from the girl. But the tall, fair boy who sat at the outer

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Wagon Rest's landscape if it had not been for their father.

David did not reply. Unlike Neal he could not refer lightly to any of the causes of Chisholm shame. Those neglected burros were a reminder of one of his father's many fruitless schemes. In a way James Chisholm still owned them. His plan had been to have the hardy, sure-footed little mules trained to carry out precious ore from a promising mining district over precipitous mountain trails no wagon or beast of burden could safely negotiate. But the newly developing mines had proved so valuable that the railroad company had built and used its own narrow-gauge line. The burros had become a drug on the market, and James Chisholm had been glad to turn them over, gratis, to the proprietor of a boys' summer camp. The seasons at the place were short. When the camp closed for the winter, the faithful little beasts were invariably turned loose. They would wander down out of the snowy heights to the towns in the lower valley, and forage for themselves as best they could.

This year, report said, the burros would likely be around all summer since the boys' camp would not reopen. Thank heaven, David thought now, the scheme upon which Dad had been bending all his energies these last two years was not one that could leave an ever-present reminder of itself upon the home town.

The approaching roar of an airplane brought a welcome interruption to his thoughts. The machine flashed above them and soared ahead into the long distance. It was a private plane, of course. This locality was entirely

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thickly dotted with sheep, was still largely unoccupied.

There were two ranches now up Old Woman's Draw. Originally there had been one and never should have been anything else. The grandmother of a prominent local resident named Maggie Herstan was the old woman for whom the Draw and its creek had been named. She had filed on the place when nearly eighty years old, and a little later had acquired all the adjacent land.

David's grandfather had bought the entire property at her death and for years had prospered on it as a range stockman. Now the only hope for a dependable livelihood from it lay in diversified farming. And up Old Woman's Draw there was not enough water and tillable land to support more than one up-to-date combined farm and ranch. James Chisholm had known this about the land he had inherited. Yet in a moment of sharp need for cash to develop one of his fruitless schemes, he had sold the upper half of the Draw to Silas Lamb for a ridiculously small sum.

Si Lamb was not an impractical dreamer like James Chisholm. He was a miner who loved mining, and had a wife who hated it. He had bought the land because she had wanted to steer their boy, Horace, into the agriculture course at high school. But Si had farmed his property so little it had won the name of Phantom Ranch. He had put upon it a low, roomy house and far more sheds than were necessary. Then he had lost interest, going back to the mining he loved and at which he showed a steady, capable industry such as he stubbornly refused to give to the farming he disliked.

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people—businessmen, loafers, Mexicans, school patrons on their way to the speaking contest—who spanned the dirt road. Valley, hanging onto David's arm, pulled him to the very forefront of the crowd, greeting vivaciously meanwhile many of the people she passed. Brother and sister found themselves facing a stretch of newly constructed fence of a most amazing kind.

They had not needed this front view to know what was going on. The fence was near completion. Already the structure rose well above the heads of the crowd in the most irregular top line David had ever known a fence to have. Yet the top line was a thing of symmetry compared to the rest of it. The entire fence had been put together out of every kind and style of lumber imaginable, none of it new. Laths, two-by-fours, floor planks, slab shingles, barked poles, short logs split puncheon style—all were combined into a compactly grotesque and most unsightly whole. Small wonder the spectators were excited.

Neither David nor Valley needed to be told why that fence had been built. It was an act of defiant spitefulness on the part of the eccentric old woman who owned those lots.

"Maggie must have scoured the town to collect as much cast-off lumber as that."

"No, she didn't, Dave," came from Valley in spontaneous outburst. "I see it all now. Every bit of it came from the Lamb ranch. There's plenty of such stuff on that tumbling-down place. I saw Mut hauling it. When I called out to jolly him about what a Future Farmer meant, wasting valuable spring planting time, hauling

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his own seventeen-year-old sister. He was even more sensitive to Valley's slighting reference to seed corn. That had to do with a goal toward which he had worked tenaciously for five long years, ever since 4H Club days.

He had two reasons for his decision to walk. He wanted to cool his anger toward Horace Lamb, long ago dubbed Mutton or Mut by schoolmates because of his last name, and he wanted to join Alex Arkins, his school teacher of vocational agriculture, whose tall figure he had spied at the farther end of the crowd. As David worked his way along the line of spectators, gossip about the amazing fence surged plentifully into his ears.

"A disgrace to the town, a thing like that."

"We'll corral a crowd to tear it down the first dark night."

"Better not. Maggie'll get the law after you."

"Authorities won't put up for long with such a public eyesore."

"I'm not so sure, when it's Maggie's. What's eatin' her, anyhow, to make her build it? Just those old Chisholm burros browsing on the weeds she's too stingy to cut? Those weeds of Maggie's, left to go to seed in the fall, are a bigger disgrace to the town than those friendly little mules have ever been."

"It ain't the weeds Maggie cares about. It's getting even with the law because she couldn't get the authorities to order the burros off the streets. She says she'll keep 'em off her property, anyway. That fence looks as if she would."

"Queer she'd get it in for old man Chisholm all of a

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than she is in sizing up what you two boys have been doing to your place, with your whole farm program—the four-year crop rotation you have worked out so well on your irrigated and dry fields and all the rest of it. You can be even surer she knows, too, not only what you have already done with that high altitude corn of yours, but what you still hope to do."

A half-bitter smile rose in David's dark blue eyes, deep-set under his straight dark brows. "Don't forget she knows that last year's crop was hailed out, too."

The two walked on in silence for some little distance. "If only," the teacher sighed at last, "you could persuade your father to realize the seriousness of the situation, to give you boys the legal right to establish an assured security for yourselves."

"I'm going up to see him about it again tomorrow." David's tone was less grim as he added, "He needs supplies for the summer, anyhow." The boy was far too loyal to add that he had little hope of attaining satisfactory results.

The teacher showed his respect for David's reserve by a deft change of subject. "Your turkey poults doing well?"

"Fine. The whole thousand of them."

"Glad you got day-old poults. A Swift and Company's man told me yesterday orders were so heavy around here this spring that all their supplies from nearby hatcheries were exhausted early. They've had to send clear to California for poults to fill their late orders."

"I know. Mut Lamb came in on those. Had to take

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panion. He walked on with them, completely unperturbed by the effect of his own sudden appearance.

"Mut Lamb all over," David thought in silent resentment. "When the day comes at last that I'm the real and legal boss of Winding Ranch—" The thought stopped precipitately, blocked by the hopelessness implied in Maggie Herstan's new fence.

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Chapter II

THE LOCAL CONTEST

DAVID walked down the main aisle of the high school auditorium alone. Mr. Arkins had parted from him at the door to attend to preliminary matters; Mut joined Neal and the other speaker in the front row. David chose a seat well forward but to one side. From it he had a view of Valley and, far more important, of Winifred Lamb. The two girls were seated side by side in the high school glee club. Alex Arkins' father and mother were in the seats next to David. They greeted the boy cordially, then froze to more formal salutation toward the next person who was claiming a seat in the same row. The newcomer was Mrs. Maggie Herstan.

It must be true, then, David thought, that Mrs. Her-

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stan had a "plaster" on the Arkins ranch, long the richest and most successfully run in the valley. Report had it that their son, Alex, could have had a much more lucrative position than the one he held in the Wagon Rest Consolidated School. Instead, fired by the practical idealism of the Future Farmers of America, he had chosen to come back to his home valley, determined to stimulate and teach boys to meet the grave agricultural problems of the day so that they could keep themselves free, as even his own capable father had not been able to do, from the clutches of persons like Mrs. Maggie Herstan.

David and his neighbors stood up to let the new arrival pass to her seat. The voluminousness of her figure would allow her entrance in no other way. Although she was a large-framed and strong woman, this was due not to her size but to the style of her dress. She wore a floor-length full skirt of the fashion of her youth and, so report had it, numerous full petticoats under it. No other person in all Happy Wagon Valley ever dressed in that completely outmoded style. With Maggie Herstan the garb was habitual. It made her instantly recognizable everywhere. There lay the real reason, David had always believed, why she dressed as she did, for despite her indifferent manner, Mrs. Herstan unquestionably enjoyed being a "character." Now, as she passed, she gave David a curt nod of recognition.

"Good evening," he responded with slightly belligerent stiffness. Considering the new fence, courtesy was difficult to muster. The greeting between the woman and David's neighbors was even more strained.

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fifty dollars in cash might mean to Neal when he entered agricultural college next fall.

The vision faded steadily as Neal's speech went on. David shifted forward nervously in his seat, silently imploring, "Snap into it, old fellow! Snap into it!" But Neal did not "snap into it." He finished almost as casually as he had begun, and the politely listening audience failed to respond with any real warmth. "What on earth is the matter with him?" David groaned to himself.

There, the three judges were questioning Neal. As a required part of the program, each speaker was tested as to his thorough knowledge of his subject and his power to think clearly while on his feet. Neal met each question calmly, pondered it a moment, then responded clearly, logically and straight to the point. David, watching the questioners, saw their faces light with satisfaction; one man, an attorney from Denver, who had been asked to serve as a judge, seemed especially pleased.

As Neal took his seat, Horace Lamb sprang to his feet. His subject was, "Erosion as a Menace to America's Agriculture. It Must Be Stopped."

David's tension broke in the relief of a grin. "Imagine Mut Lamb stopping it." David knew from the stir through the audience that he was not the only person who found secret amusement in the thought. He centered on Mut a gaze that challenged, "Beat Neal if you dare!" The eyes of the two boys met and clashed. Mut shifted position nervously on his feet, cleared his throat and resolutely looked away. But David kept his challenging gaze fixed on Mut during the next ten minutes, and thus was completely unaware that Maggie Herstan

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nounced their verdict. "The opinion of the judges was not unanimous. One judge voted for Robert McNeal Chisholm as winner." (That Denver attorney, David felt sure.) "The other two, for Horace Lamb. Since the majority decision rules, Horace Lamb is the winner of the contest, and next week will represent the Wagon Rest Consolidated High School in competition with the winners of the contests in the other high schools of the district."

As the meeting broke up, David lingered near his seat, hoping that Neal would soon be free of the group at the front. Loyalty demanded that he go promptly to his defeated brother's side. As Maggie Herstan brushed past him, he became suddenly aware that she was addressing him. "What do you two young Chisholms mean, letting that young upstart beat you out?" She strode on without giving David a chance to reply. To his amazement he found his inner response rising in defense of Horace. Mut was no upstart; his greatest handicap so far had been his lack of persistence, the result of going off half-cocked at every new thing that came along, the way he had in answer to those questions tonight. Neal certainly had beaten Horace there.

A moment later David heard the Denver judge make that very remark to Neal. "There was real thought in your talk tonight, boy, and in your replies to your questions. You kept your head and your power to think clearly while on your feet. I scored you high enough on that to make you my choice for winner. But you lacked the fire the other boy had in his platform presence and in his delivery. Get it! Learn how to reveal to your audi-

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ing in the spotlight. Strutting in the public eye. How he loves it! And, of course, there's precious little of it to be had grubbing on their out-of-the-way, run-down ranch. Poor Winifred! She'll have a harder time than ever this summer, holding Mut down to real work at home. And if he doesn't—" Valley shrugged suggestively to imply the hopelessness of the Lamb ranch situation. Presently she added, "I wouldn't mind Mut's winning tonight so much if it wasn't for the way he helped Maggie Herstan with that awful fence."

David had much the same feeling. He accepted the shift of subject. "Neal, it looks as if we might have to round up those burros and graze them again on some of the home foothills that the turkeys won't need."

Neal stiffened. "Absolutely nothing doing! No *worthless* stock, ever again, grazing on those hills! Above all, now, when once again they're worth something."

David welcomed Neal's mandate. Both Chisholm boys had big dreams of all that wide, winding foothill grazing acreage. Long overstocked, during the boys' childhood, under their father's neglectful management, those acres had become almost worthless from overcropping. Then James Chisholm had lost his run-down stock in a big winter snowstorm, and for years much of the range had lain idle, to its great benefit. Rest had restored it to fertility, reseeded it with new grasses. Once again it was ready to make of the old Chisholm place a real ranch, a Western farm that raises livestock on the range in goodly numbers. In recent years, with the boys as its workers, the place had been merely a small farm.

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Chapter III

A CALL ON DAD

BEFORE daylight the following morning David built the kitchen fire, put the teakettle on to boil and went outside to do the early chores. When he carried the foaming milk pails into the house, Neal was in the kitchen, stirring oatmeal and breaking eggs into the sputtering grease in the frying pan.

"Knew you'd need an early start." The words were muttered in an apologetic tone.

"You're a knowing kid," David returned gratefully.

When Neal commented, "It's all right to try again, old man. But you won't get anywhere," discouragement settled upon David's spirit in spite of himself.

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road of the small open canyon in the foothills known as Old Woman's Draw. The irregular fields the sun revealed were freshly green in some places; in others they were dark and beautifully smooth with soil plowed and harrowed powder-fine in readiness for planting. The choicest five acres were already dotted with faint delicate sproutings of the seed corn he had bred himself from previous plantings of a hardy variety known as Minnesota 13.

That field, the soil of which had been made richly productive by previous crops of alfalfa, was the pride and the hope of David's coming season. Boy though he was, he had worked for years, as had a number of the more intelligent of the community's farmers, toward the cultivation of a real corn crop of well-matured ears. Such a crop had never before been raised in this high country with its relatively short growing season and its lack of warm nights. "If only hail and Maggie Herstan hold off," he thought now.

Out from the Draw David traveled for some distance until he came to a smooth Federal highway running through the wide plain of one of Colorado's most productive agricultural valleys. Here and there he passed through small, clean-aired, sun-bathed towns. Then once again he turned into mountain country. Soon he was following another Federal road that climbed and wound up a magnificent mountain canyon.

For forty miles David followed this canyon road. Then at one of the valley intersections he left it for another, very different from the smooth tourist highway

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The emotion it aroused in him, however, was not that of an artist kindled by its beauty. Rather it was a feeling of resentment. For that view did something to him that made him understand altogether too well why his father was satisfied to spend days and years in utter loneliness, working hard without recompense for the sake of an empty dream. And today of all times David did not want to feel too sympathetic toward Dad.

As Flap Jack and his rider took up their journey, followed by the swaying gait of the pack-laden Dried Apple, they traveled a thin line of what in bygone days had been a well-worn trail, but which was now rough, faint and often almost impassable. It led to a group of decaying buildings on the opposite slopes that rose like ugly dark blots among patches of scrub green growth and bare yellow ground. They were the abandoned buildings of the Camp Mule mine.

Before one of the crumbling shacks which commanded the finest view, Flap Jack and his rider, with Dried Apple behind them, came to a halt. The door was closed, smoke rose from the patched chimney and sounds came from within. A radio hummed and a typewriter clacked.

So Dad was not at work today, digging, setting charges, blasting away to run a new tunnel into that old exhausted mine, in the vain hope of striking a new vein. Only with Dad, of course, the hope was not impossible. According to Horace Lamb's father and the Denver mining company, it was strong enough for James Chisholm to have been willing to undertake single-handed the long, arduous task of boring that tunnel; and

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hadn't packed up these tubes—and wire and dial—and battery and trickle charger—to rig up—this radio. As 'tis —a lot of the time I get everything—often clear as crystal —almost no static. Since Si got me—this chance—I owe him something. So what's the latest? A newspaper—with Guard here—for my delivery boy. Guard knows those fellows up there—and he knows the way in. We're a good team, aren't we, Guard?"

The big collie dog lay in expectant alertness at the foot of the crude table, thumping a response with his tail. He was a beautiful creature, unusually large for a collie, his thick coat all white except for three golden-brown patches. His owner let an affectionate hand drop for an instant on the dog's long head. "Guard's impatient. Excuse us, David, while I get this last item or two typed off. With your help we'll send Si's gang a newspaper this time that is a newspaper. They're all Wagon Valley men like Si and me."

"Are they all working for nothing, too, not even a grubstake?" David thought resentfully. Si Lamb had "wished off" on Dad this Camp Mule job. Si himself was receiving regular monthly cash pay for bossing a crew of men starting to rework the old almost inaccessible Angela mine. He could easily have put Dad on that paid crew. Instead, he had lured him for those worthless shares into this slow, dangerous job of blasting a new Camp Mule crosswise tunnel.

Over the radio a news announcer was signing off, and Dad was completely absorbed in his typing. Easy enough to see what he was doing. He was typing off on that ramshackle machine the news from the broadcast

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this resentment may lead, considering the hold Mrs. Herstan has upon the property. It is well known that the younger Chisholm sons have been putting all their effort into Winding Ranch in the hope of bringing it back to something like real productiveness."

Mr. Chisholm lifted his hands from the machine and dropped them into his lap. "Of course, you mean that for me, David, not for the paper." His tone was hurt rather than angry.

"Guess that's about it, Dad." Ashamed of his roundabout method of approach, David was also relieved that Dad had been so quick to understand. Now they could come right out in the open and talk. "You've got to own up," David spoke more persuasively now, "that such things don't promise any too rosy a future to two fellows as enthusiastic about farming as Neal and I are."

"Why not, Dave? I've signed over to you two boys, in your regulation Future Farmer style, the right to use any or all of the whole place any way you wish."

"And what good will that do us—or all the work we've put upon it—if you lose the place?"

"If that was going to happen, it would have happened long ago. Abe Herstan never even pressed me."

"But Abe's dead now. And everything he owned belongs to his widow. And Maggie isn't Abe. There's never any knowing what she's going to spring next."

"Abe's been dead 'most a year and Maggie's never pressed me, either." Dad spoke as if what he was really saying was, "I'm not afraid of Maggie."

If Dad wasn't afraid of Maggie, he was the only

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it. David almost never spoke of it, but the recollection of it now softened his mood. He went on in more practical persuasiveness, "Besides, George and Steve never saw any hope in agriculture. They went to high school before farm boys had a chance at the practical, scientific vocational training Neal and I have had under Alex Arkins. Neal and I have really been doing things, Dad—in a small way, of course—these last years. Don't you think Maggie Herstan's keen enough to see that?

"Maybe, if we go on improving the place for another year, it will be worth having again. But what's the use of Neal and me putting in all the brain and brawn we've got on a ranch where we haven't any real security? One that could be taken away from us at any moment? Suppose Neal and I could raise the money to meet the taxes and pay off the unpaid interest and all that, what good would that do? The place would still be yours; *we'd* have no security on it."

The boy paused. Did Dad catch the implied fear that if he, their father, were again in a financial position to raise even a small sum of money from the place, he might do so because of some new fantastic scheme? "But if you'd just deed the place over to us, Dad—" Pleadingly David's dark blue eyes, glowing with desperate hopefulness, rested on his father. Then the glow snapped off with the suddenness of an electric light as he saw his father's unmistakable swift refusal.

James Chisholm's answer was sharp with new decisiveness. "You're not twenty-one yet, David. And Neal's only eighteen."

"I'll be twenty-one the tenth of August." But spirit

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this job for. But I never meant to tell it until the right moment came. I guess, though, that you and Neal have a right to know what I'm up to."

Dad's voice had risen until it almost sang. "One of these days—the time's not very far off, either—I'm going to deed all Winding Ranch over to you, or to you and Neal if he still wants it. I'm not so sure about Neal. I'm hoping he'll change into some other course, drop agriculture, after he gets to college. When am I going to do that deeding? The very minute I get the old place free of debt. And that's exactly what it's going to be as soon as I strike the vein in this tunnel. I'm going to strike it mighty soon now. But nothing will ever induce me to hand the ranch over to you the way it is now. I think far too much of my boys ever to consent to a thing like that." He paused; then seeing no sign of response in David, went on:

"*But*—free from debt—all newly equipped with the stock you say it needs so badly, with really up-to-date machinery and equipment, with the buildings all repaired—just you wait and see, Dave. Only don't let Maggie Herstan get a suspicion of my plan; I want to surprise her, get even with her for always being so contemptuous of my schemes. That's one reason why I've kept this one so secret. But it's what I'm dreaming about and working for all the time. It's why I'm content to lead this lonely life up here. Haven't you ever guessed that?"

Dutifully David raised his dark blue eyes to meet his father's equally blue ones. "Thanks, Dad," he managed to mutter, trying hard to make the words sound con-

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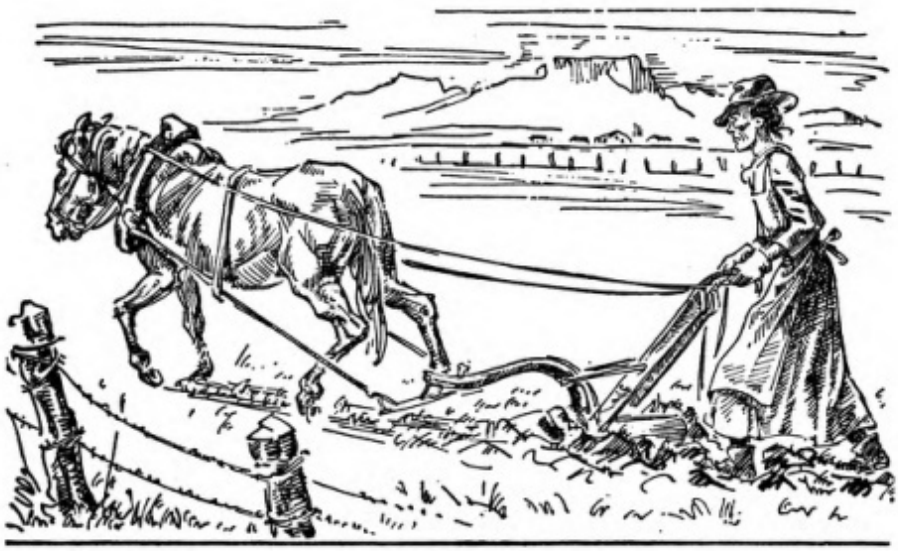

Chapter IV

QUEER MAGGIE HERSTAN

DAVID hesitated in front of Maggie Herstan's front gate. Should he enter, or was the time unfavorable? The automobile standing in front of the old-fashioned horse block looked like the one driven by Jack Haines, the county sheriff. David's glance rested on the house as if to penetrate its thick walls.

One of the oldest houses in Wagon Rest, it had once been much the finest, and time and lack of repair had never been able to mar its dignity. Its originally white brick was dingy now with age. Its wooden porches, steps and window casings sagged a little here and there, and were worn to a dark and lusterless gray. Maggie's place occupied an entire block of land, enclosed by a picket

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again. As she turned the horse and plow, as deftly as before, and began the advance in David's direction, she commented grimly, "So you've got grit. Well, your mother had it, the quiet kind. I respected that woman."

Surprised response kindled in David.

"I like grit," she added. "The kind that's not afraid to work. But, bah, your generation doesn't even know what grit is. Want their chances in life handed out to them on a tray instead of putting up a stiff fight to get them for themselves. Blatting that the world owes them a living and all that kind of bosh, while they let their backbones turn to jelly, leaning on relief. They make me sick."

David forgot to be tactful. "Future Farmers don't," he retorted indignantly. "There's no industry in the country has had such a tough time these last years as agriculture. But you'll find precious few Future Farmers on relief."

"That so?" Again the words were a challenge but there was a pleased note in them. She had liked rather than resented David's indignation. "If you don't want favors, what brought you here?" she finished gruffly.

David told her of the proposed plan for the unwanted burros. If she felt relieved as the sheriff had in finding a graceful way out of a difficult situation, she gave no evidence of it, merely commenting, "That father of yours isn't altogether a fool."

"He certainly isn't," David retorted with spirit. This woman kept him in a continually shifting state of emotional response that was decidedly uncomfortable;

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